

At the Sanctuary June 2018

Robyn Howard

The unseasonal rain continued throughout June and maintained vegetation at its peak, and also seemed to keep the bird population happy and active. Some were even building nests, but none were noted actually raising young. White-browed Scrubwrens chose a quiet site in a Lomandra close to the buildings, but unfortunately, it was beside the door to our meeting room. The quiet suddenly ceased at meeting time, and turned to lots of activity.



White-browed Scrubwren's nest with entrance low at the front

There have been good populations of both Grey and Little Shrike thrushes at the sanctuary and they have been favouring trees towards the end of the concrete section of the track. After several Greys being in occupation, the next day there were three pairs of Littles, all competing vocally.

Both species have such beautiful songs. Scarlet, Brown, White-throated and Lewin's Honeyeaters have had a strong presence, also singing regularly. We do not often see Topknot Pigeons but a flock of ten birds made their appearance one day. In general, the Golden Whistlers and Eastern Yellow Robins have not called so much, but that is normal for this time of year. The robins have been roadside more than in the forest. Four pairs of Willie Wagtails have divided the roadside into territories, from near the borrow pits to the carpark. They are a cheeky and cheery presence. A group of crows has been intermittently frequenting the area near the rotunda below the Visitors' Centre, and behaving as though expecting to be fed or to find food. I trust nobody is feeding them or leaving scraps as they are wonderful birds in their natural habitat with natural behaviours, but they can become almost pests when attracted to unnatural food sources in human habitation.

Crab numbers on the mud have been fluctuating. There are always fewer seen in cold months, but some days there were mostly smaller specimens and those with darker colouring, making them less noticeable. At other times, there were hundreds of Orange-clawed Fiddlers which visitors love to watch. Very few Barred Mudskippers have been parading.



A pair of Little Shrike-thrushes serenading each other

Grey mangroves are still dropping fruit (some of which are huge), the Stilt-rooted Mangroves are coming into bud whilst also forming hypocotyls, the Orange Mangroves are at all stages from buds to mature hypocotyls, and the River Mangroves are heavily in bud, some buds just forming and some plump as though ready to burst into flower.

On the evening when Dr Les Hall gave his educational and entertaining presentation on local bats, a Southern Boobook sat calling in a Eucalypt near the Education building. A cat was also heard nearby and was thought not to be feral but probably a dumped unwanted pet. It was hungry so two of the visitors managed to capture the animal and take it to a care centre.

The new Display Cabinet has several items in its various compartments but we still need more natural interesting items. Perhaps members may have some suitable contributions. We hope to be able to have a section of aboriginal artefacts but are awaiting a meeting for some discussion and planning. The new Micro-eye has proved a wonderful addition to the Visitor Centre, popular with both adults and young people. Even leaves and feathers are fascinating under a microscope and this one is so simple to use and the display screen is so clear.

The Bird Observers of Pumicestone Passage and Surrounds visited during the month and enjoyed the various areas. It took ages to progress through the Melaleuca Forest with so many birds present, many attracted by the blossoms, and others by the insects around the blossoms - at least 10 nectar-drinking species, several Olive-backed Orioles, Varied Trillers, and more. The Australian Owlet-nightjar called near the river (unusual for a nocturnal bird), a Black Kite was above the carpark, Chestnut Teal were on the dam opposite, and in the forests were three different kingfisher species, Rose Robin, Dusky Honeyeater, Noisy and Little Friarbirds, Mistletoebird, and many more – 62 species in all. Everyone had hoped to see our Shining Flycatchers as they are so beautiful but rarely seen on the group's outings. Unfortunately, they missed out, but George saw the female the following day. In

compensation, they did have lovely views of the magnificent Tailed Emperor (butterfly) which sat warming in the early sunlight.



Tailed Emperor – one of our less common butterflies on the Sunshine Coast



Olive-backed Oriole Photo: Patrick K59

June falls during the breeding season for most raptors, and it may have been why six different species were sighted. Raptors not seen on a regular basis included a Black Kite and a Wedge-tailed Eagle. The Eagle did not land, just soared around before heading down the coast.



Black Kite

Beside the boardwalk near the river, the Tuckeroos were blooming prolifically. A few Honey Bees were buzzing around, but well over 500 Sugarbag Bees (the stingless native species *Tetragonula carbonaria*) were busy around the flowers. There must be at least one hive nearby, probably more, but I have never found them.

The damp conditions have been good for fungi, so Judith has been busy searching them out. Even we inexperienced observers are able to enjoy the different shapes and colours, knowing how valuable they are in the environment. Several shrubs, trees and vines have continued to flower, especially the Monkey Rope vine (*Parsonsia straminea*). So many creatures use the Parsonsia – possums, several

butterfly species, and other insects. One of those butterflies is the Common Crow and George and I found one of its empty pupa cases where a butterfly had recently emerged.



Mirror-like pupa of the Common Crow

George is still picking up some interesting fauna on the motion detection camera. The Short-beaked Echidna has become a regular star and recently there was a short video of it snuffling through the forest-floor litter. (I think Uwe has put that on Facebook.) The brownie points for the month, though, go to the Russet-tailed Thrush. It once used to be seen occasionally in the rainforest, but since the change to the course of the boardwalk, it has not been seen or heard nor picked up on camera. Wonderful to know they are still in the area.

As I left the forest one day, I was listening to all the cacophony and melody of so many birds. Suddenly, one loud shrill call emanated from above and every other bird shot in panic deep into the protection of undergrowth or rainforest. The call was that of the Collared Sparrowhawk, but I could not find the

bird at first. Three more times the call came, each time from a different position, but always hidden by thick foliage. The other birds all remained silent. I eventually found the culprit, which then changed to its natural call. A Spangled Drongo! I have heard them mimic various birds in the past and this effort seemed perfect. It had fooled all the birds as well as me. It was up there bouncing around, chattering, highly amused with its own antics.



Spangled Drongo – What an amazing mimic! Photo: Sandra Harald

Unless stated otherwise all photos: Robyn Howard